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ABSTRACT

Persistence rates and College Level Academic Skills Test (CLAST) passing rates are the two outcome measures most often used to assess success at Miami-Dade Community College (MDCC). A study was conducted to examine these two measures for comparative groups of students whose performance on the basic skills assessment measure ranged from passing no tests to passing all tests, and who subsequently satisfactorily completed college preparatory instruction in none or all of the areas. First-time-in-college students from the fall 1982 term were chosen for the study. Study findings included the following: (1) students who completed college preparatory courses in all areas for which they were underprepared had the same persistence rates as students without skills deficiencies; (2) the persistence rate for students below the placement score on all three tests ranged from 10% for those who took no college preparatory work to 46% for those who completed work in all three deficiency areas; (3) underprepared students took longer to complete their education; (4) students completing college preparatory courses in the areas in which they had skill deficiencies had a higher CLAST passing rate (81%) than those who did not complete college preparatory classes (56%); and (5) students who successfully completed all necessary college preparatory classes had the same 3-year persistence rates as students who began with no skill deficiencies. A discussion of the implications of the findings is included and data tables are appended. (EJV)

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COLLEGE PREPARATORY ANALYSIS, PART I:

FIRST-TIME-IN-COLLEGE STUDENTS
FALL 1982
COLLEGE-WIDE SUMMARY

Research Report No. 85-35

December 1985

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Miami-Dade Community College

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College Preparatory Analysis, Part I:
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Introduction

This report is the first in a series that will be generated from recently developed data bases on college preparatory performance. The files were established to provide more comprehensive data than we have had to date, permitting refinements in analysis. Earlier studies have highlighted differences in outcomes for students below the placement test cutoff scores on one or more basic skills area. Losak and Morris (1982) contrasted outcomes for tested full-time students from Fall 1980 who passed all three versus none of the placement tests. The two-year persistence rate (graduated or still enrolled) for students above the placement score on all three tests was 92% compared to 52% for students below on all three. In a later parallel study, Belcher and Losak (1985) found a 91% pass rate on the sophomore exit exam (College Level Academic Skills Test, or CLAST) for students above the cutoff score on all three placement tests, compared to a 21% rate for students below on all three.

Losak (1983) has demonstrated that there is no clear basic skills demarcation point below which we can identify students who will not succeed. Even those below the 10th percentile on all three placement tests show a surprising 23% success rate (graduated or earned 30+ credits with a GPA > 2.00 after two years). Of the 1,973 Fall Term 1981 freshmen who wrote the CLAST by Fall 1984, 53% entered the college with low placement test scores in one or more areas (Belcher and Losak 1985). Miami-Dade is clearly providing opportunities for students who would otherwise be excluded from postsecondary education.

These research findings demonstrate eventual success for the academically underprepared, but it is obvious and expected that success rates for such students are lower than for their more academically able counterparts. Efforts to help such students become competitive begin with the college preparatory courses at Miami-Dade, followed by the normal curriculum interventions provided all students. The efficacy of the college preparatory experience has been only partially addressed, since prior research grouped students on the basis of enrollment in one or more college preparatory courses, but did not consider whether students successfully completed all courses in areas where they were underprepared.

Losak (1984) related first term enrollment in developmental (college preparatory) courses to passing all four CLAST subtests. He found a lower passing rate for students who had taken even one college preparatory course. The data do not indicate whether these students were underprepared in only one area, or if they successfully completed the college preparatory course. Belcher (1985b) examined the relationship between college preparatory work in reading, writing, and mathematics, and performance on the corresponding CLAST subtests. She found little difference in CLAST passing rates between underprepared students who took or did not take college preparatory coursework. That is, taking the courses did not improve the chances of success on the CLAST.

Persistence rates and CLAST passing rates are the two outcome measures most often used to measure success at Miami-Dade. Persistence rate (graduated or still enrolled) is a sensitive indicator when students begin with uneven academic achievements and therefore need varying amounts of time to graduate. CLAST passing rates are a final determinant of competitiveness for those students who are ready to graduate. The purpose of the present study is to examine these two measures for comparative groups of students whose performance on the basic skills assessment measure ranged from passing no tests to passing all tests, and who subsequently satisfactorily completed college preparatory instruction in none or all of the areas. First-time-in-college students from the Fall Term of 1982 were chosen for the analysis because that was the first year of a generally consistent testing and

college preparatory placement program across all campuses since 1975. The modal graduation rate for students at Miami-Dade and most two-year colleges is the third year, thus the end of the 1984-85 academic year marked the first opportunity to examine the cohort of students after three years.

Results and Discussion

Tables 1 and 2 present data on persistence rates (graduated or re-enrolled) after three years. Basic skills categories (below in one area, two areas, etc.) are grouped down the left of the Table and college preparatory experience (successfully completed one, two, etc.) along the top. This results in ten comparative groups displayed in a matrix with outcome measures for each group. Students were counted as successfully completing college preparatory work in an area only if they received an "S" in the highest level college preparatory course. The diagonal on the Tables is highlighted in bold type, and shows the outcome for students who successfully completed all college preparatory work for which they were below the placement score.

The data show that students who successfully complete college preparatory courses in all areas where they are underprepared have the same persistence rates as students who begin with no skills deficiencies. Even those students who failed all three portions of the basic skills assessment battery are on a competitive par with those who failed no part of the assessment battery. The data also show a systematic decrease in persistence rates as fewer college preparatory courses are completed. The attrition rate for students below the placement score on all three tests is quite high and only 11% have so far completed all college preparatory work. But for those who did complete it all, the likelihood of graduation has increased ninefold.

Figure 1 contrasts the data for students who successfully completed all college preparatory work with data for students who successfully completed none. The difference in persistence rates is striking. The reader should note that over 60% of the students who were

below the placement score on all three tests yet completed no college preparatory work persisted beyond their first term. Thus the low three-year rate seen in Figure 1 cannot be attributed to first term attrition which would (of necessity) remove the opportunity to complete college preparatory courses.

It is apparent in the data above that students who are below the placement score on several basic skills areas take longer to complete their education. Their persistence rates are composed primarily of students who are still enrolled rather than graduates. In order to increase the number of students in the data base who had reached the point of graduation, the CLAST data files were used. Students on these files began their enrollment at different points in time, but have in common the year (or term) they wrote the CLAST. Table 3 and Figure 2 present data for all CLAST examinees from the 1984-85 academic year who also had entering basic skills test scores. The data are configured in the same matrix as the previous tables, but here the outcomes measured are CLAST passing rates. Once again, the comparative rates highlighted in bold type are for students who successfully completed all college preparatory work for which they were eligible.

It is clear from Table 3 that students who complete college preparatory work in the areas where they are below the placement score have higher passing rates than students who do not. For students below the placement score on all three basic skills area, 81% of those who completed all college preparatory courses passed 3 or 4 CLAST subtests compared to 56% of those who completed no college preparatory courses. The data show a systematic increase in pass rates as more college preparatory areas are completed. It is also clear, however, that students who begin with skills deficiencies have lower CLAST passing rates than students who do not.

Since an entire curriculum intervenes between completion of college preparatory coursework and writing the CLAST, a link needs to be made between later course performance and the CLAST. Several existing research studies provide a clue as to why complete remediation still does not place students on a competitive par. Belcher (1984a, 1984b) found that passing rates on the communications sections of the CLAST were related both

to the number of English courses taken and the grades earned. In general, more English courses yielded higher pass rates, but not if the grades earned were "C" or less.

Belcher (1985a) extended the analysis of courses and grades to consider entering basic skills levels. This is a key point for the present analysis. She found that students who were below the entering placement score in both reading and writing benefited most from a third English course- specifically ENC 2301, but were the least likely to take it. While their pass rate jumped to approximately 86% on the CLAST communications sections if ENC 2301 was taken (compared to about 60% if not) only 4% had done so. This proportion is small enough to be cautious with generalizations. Analysis of ENC 1102 grades and entering basic skills level also revealed that the modal ENC 1102 grade for students below the placement score in reading and writing was a "C" (56% of these students earned a "C"). Recall from the research cited above that "C" grades do not bode well for CLAST success.

Data in the present report show that students who successfully complete all necessary college preparatory courses have the same three-year persistence rates as students who begin with no skills deficiencies. The attrition rate for students with skills deficiencies is high, however, and only 11% of those who began with deficiencies in all three areas in 1982 have completed their college preparatory work. Yet their graduation rate is nine times higher than those who did not complete it all.

This is a complex "catch 22" issue for the open door two-year college. Criticized for having high attrition rates (Miami Herald, December 11, 1985), open door colleges could not possibly maintain academic quality if attrition rates were as low as those in selective admissions institutions. The public often forgets that one of the major charges of the open door college is to serve as a second chance for many citizens. In so doing, the colleges must also be prepared to "wash out" many who aspire but do not achieve. A high attrition rate indicates that open door colleges have not abdicated responsibility for maintaining quality.

The present report also noted that students who successfully complete necessary college preparatory work have higher CLAST passing rates than their underprepared counterparts who do not; but still have lower passing rates than students who begin without deficiencies. The proposed explanation is that once the college preparatory courses are completed, students are less inclined to take additional courses beyond those required, and that in the required courses these same students are more likely to earn a "C." The combination of these two factors leads to lower CLAST passing rates. It should be possible to counsel students who have persisted through college preparatory coursework to learn the skills necessary to earn at least a "B" (through retakes if necessary) in CLAST related courses. While ENC 2301 is now a required course for all Associate in Arts degree seekers, it is clear that the underprepared student derives the most benefit from this additional course.

In summary, the data clearly demonstrate that Miami-Dade is accomplishing the dual mission of providing an effective opportunity for underprepared but motivated students, while maintaining academic standards. The persistence rates and improved CLAST passing rates of students who complete college preparatory work speak for themselves. That attrition is high in the open door college is testimony to the responsibility inherent in such an endeavor.

Table 1

Three Year Persistence Rates (Graduated or Re-enrolled) For Tested First-Time-in-College-Students Who Entered Fall Term 1982

Total Group

Below Placement Score in:		Successfully Completed College Preparatory in: No Area		One Area		Two Areas		Three Areas	
	N=	2021							
No Area	Graduated	533	26%						
(N=2021)	Still Enrolled	430	21%						
	Total	963	**47%**						
	N=	873		651					
One Area	Graduated	95	11%	136	21%				
(N=1524)	Still Enrolled	149	17%	164	25%				
	Total	244	28%	300	**46%**				
	N=	530		509		321			
Two Areas	Graduated	25	5%	56	11%	49	15%		
(N=1360)	Still Enrolled	47	9%	130	26%	104	33%		
	Total	72	14%	186	37%	153	**48%**		
	N=	641		357		303		156	
Three Areas	Graduated	7	1%	12	4%	24	8%	14	9%
(N=1457)	Still Enrolled	56	9%	69	19%	89	29%	58	37%
	Total	63	10%	81	23%	113	37%	72	**46%**

Table 2

Three Year Persistence Rates (Graduated or Re-enrolled) For Tested First-Time-in-College-Students Who Entered Fall Term 1982

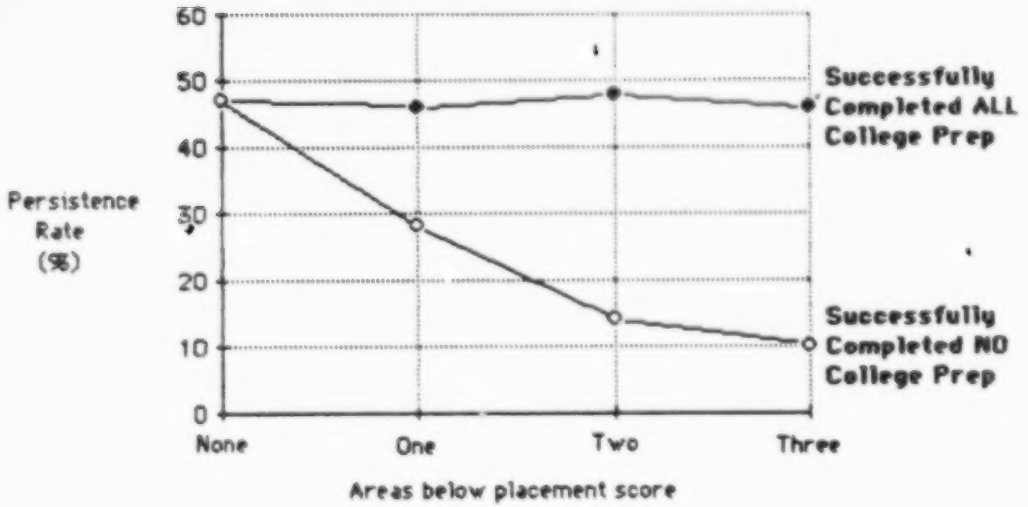
Full-Time Students

Below Placement Score in:		Successfully Completed College Preparatory in: No Area		One Area		Two Areas		Three Areas	
	N=	1331							
No Area	Graduated	437	33%						
(N=1331)	Still Enrolled	267	20%						
	Total	704	**53%**						
	N=	447		422					
One Area	Graduated	82	18%	111	26%				
(N=869)	Still Enrolled	78	18%	104	25%				
	Total	160	36%	215	**51%**				
	N=	246		296		214			
Two Areas	Graduated	17	7%	48	16%	39	18%		
(N=756)	Still Enrolled	25	10%	68	23%	73	34%		
	Total	42	17%	114	39%	112	**52%**		
	N=	266		194		169		100	
Three Areas	Graduated	7	2%	11	6%	20	12%	13	13%
(N=729)	Still Enrolled	26	10%	43	22%	48	28%	34	34%
	Total	33	12%	54	28%	68	40%	**47**	**47%**

Figure 1

Three Year Persistence Rates (Graduated or Re-enrolled) For Tested First-Time-in-College-Students Who Entered Fall Term 1982

Total Group



Full-Time Students

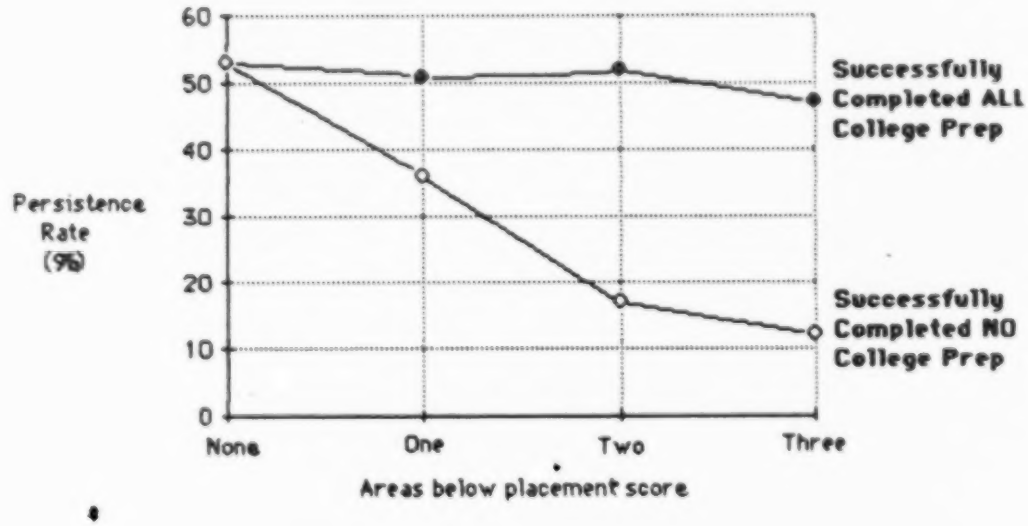


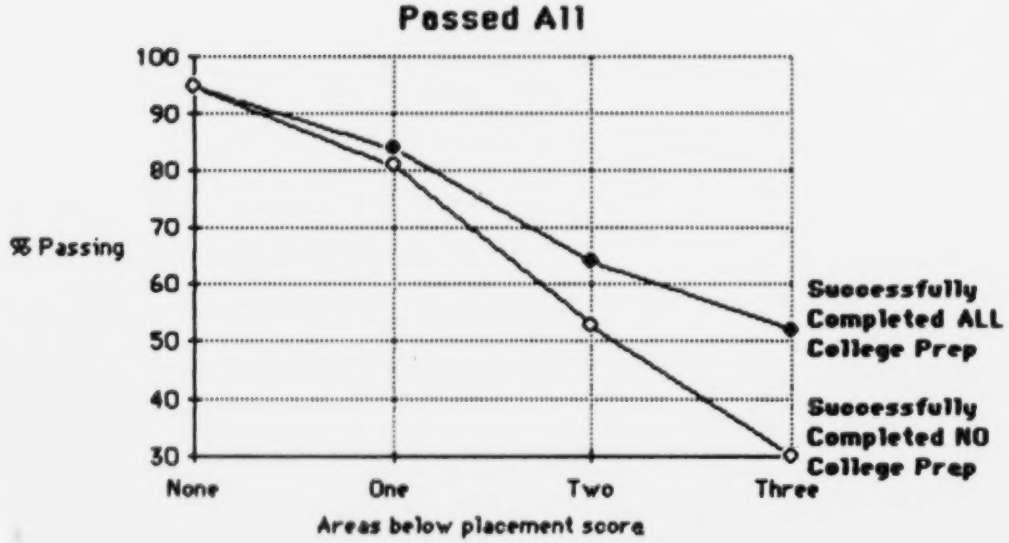
Table 3

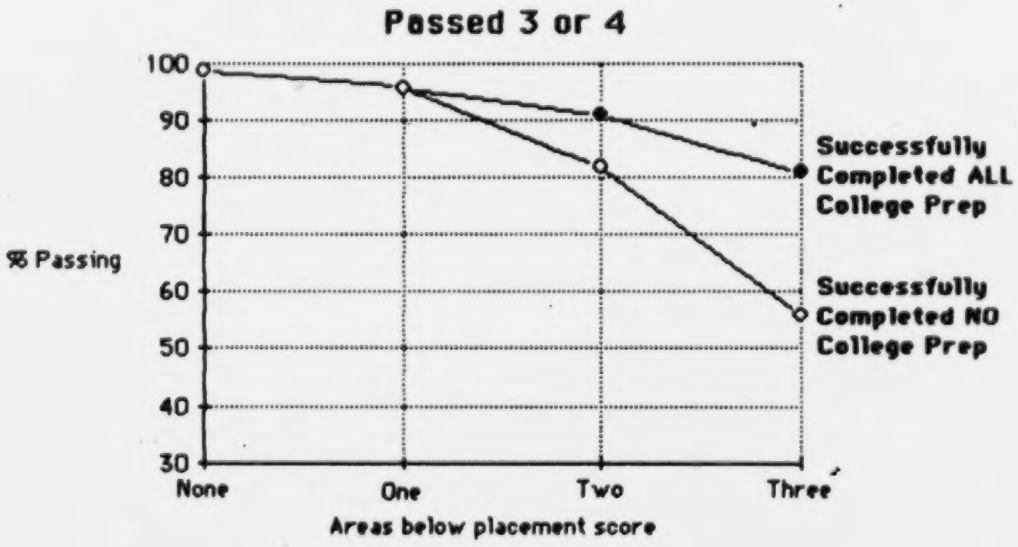
Passing Rates for 1984-85 CLAST Examinees Related to Placement Test Results and College Preparatory Success

Below Placement Score in:		Successfully Completed College Preparatory in: No Area		One Area		Two Areas		Three Areas	
No Area	N=	1091							
	Passed All	1031	95%						
	Passed 3 or 4	1090	**99%**						
One Area	N=	336		276					
	Passed All	271	81%	232	84%				
	Passed 3 or 4	324	96%	266	**96%**				
Two Areas	N=	163		113		79			
	Passed All	86	53%	67	59%	51	64%		
	Passed 3 or 4	133	82%	100	88%	72	**91%**		
Three Areas	N=	108		62		44		27	
	Passed All	32	30%	23	37%	16	36%	14	52%
	Passed 3 or 4	61	56%	38	61%	37	84%	22	**81%**

Figure 2

Passing Rates for 1984-85 CLAST Examinees Related to Placement Test Results and College Peparatory Success





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